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THE WRITINGS OF LOUIS HENNEPIN,

RECOLLECT FRANCISCAN MISSIONARY,

BY

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Prepared for the monthly meeting of the Department of American History, Minnesota Historical Society, on September 6, 1880, at Minneapolis.

Louis Hennepin, a Missionary of the Recollect branch of Franciscans attached to La Salle's expedition to the Illinois river, has for two centuries borne an unenviable reputation.

Do his writings warrant the charge against his integrity as a man and Christian missionary?

THE DESCRIPTION OF LOUISIANA, A. D. 1683.

The first work bearing his name was entitled, "Description de la Louisiane," and in 1683 published in Paris.*

As soon as the book appeared it was criticised. Abbe Bernou, on the 29th of February, 1684, writes from Rome about the "bad book" (meschant livre) of Father Hennepin. About a year before, the pious Tronson, under date of March 13, 1683, wrote to a friend: "I have interviewed the P. Recollect, who *pretends* to have descended the Mississippi river to the Gulf of Mexico. I do not know that one *will believe what he speaks* any more than that which is in the *printed relation* of P. Louis, which I send you that you may make your own reflections." Then still about a year earlier, La Salle, on the 22d of August, 1682, writes from Fort Frontenac, now Kingston, Canada, that Hennepin had established a character as an ex-

*The full title is: "Description de la Louisiane, Nouvellement Decouverte au Sud 'Ouest de la Nouvelle France, par ordre du Roy.

Avec La Carte du Pays; les mœurs and la maniere de vivre des Sauvages.

Dediee a sa Majeste, Par le R. P. Louis Hennepin, Missionaire Recollet & Notaire Apostolique.

A Paris, Chez la veuve Sebastian Hure; rue Saint Jacques, a l'Image S Jerome, pres S. Severin. M. DC. LXXXIII. Avec privilege du Roy."

aggerator, that his language represented things "as he wished them to be, and not as they were."

EXAGGERATIONS.

In the dedication of his book to Louis the Fourteenth, he writes: "We have given the name of Louisiana to this great discovery." Documents, however, prepared before the book was printed, call the region "Louisiana."

Hennepin describes animals caught in the current, and forced over Niagara Falls "*more than six hundred feet in height.*"

The brave Henry Tonty, who was also a member of La Salle's expedition, in a letter written from Quebec, A. D. 1684, estimates the Falls to be "one hundred and fifty feet in height," and was near the truth.

Some years ago, the writer of this review visited the ruins of the ancient churches of the seventh century, at Glendalough, in County Wicklow, Ireland, and a female guide there told some marvellous stories. Being asked if she always spoke the truth, her reply was, "I do, but I magnify the truth to please visitors." Hennepin, like the old woman, loved to "magnify the truth."

On the map accompanying his first book, he boldly marks a Recollect Mission many miles north of the point he had visited. In the Utrecht edition of 1697 this deliberate fraud is erased.

PLAGIARISM.

His first work, upon examination, seems to be a compilation from the writings of others, with the interjection of exaggerations.

A comparison of the "Official Relation of La Salle's voyage from 1679 to 1681," with the "Description of Louisiana," shows a remarkable similarity of language. For instance, examine the description, in each, of Lake Superior or Conde, and Lake Illinois or Dauphin, now Michigan.

Relation of La Salle's Voyage, 1679–81.

"Le lac Superieur et celuy des Illinois sont les plus esloignez du coste du couchant. Le premier, qui s'estend de l'est a l'ouest, a cent cinquante lieues de longeur, soixante de largeur et environ pres de cinq cents lieues de tour.

Le Second, qui est situe' au nord et au sud, a cent vingt ou cent trente lieues de longueur quarante ou cinquante de largeur et pres de quatre cents lieues de tour."

Hennepin's Description, 1683.

"Le Lac de Conde et le Lac Dauphin sont les plus eloignez du coste du couchant, le premier qui s'estend de l'est a l'ouest a cent cinquante lieues de longeur et environ cinq cens lieues de tour:

Le second qui est scitue au Nord et Sud a cent vingt ou cent trente de longeur, et quarante a cinquante lieues de largeur, et pres de quatre cents lieuesde tour."

Several pages could be given, but we have only space for a few more resemblances.

In the account prepared of La Salle's voyage, is a narrative of his travels in the Valley of the Illinois River in January, 1680, which is used by Hennepin in the Description of Louisiana with a remarkable change of one word. The Memoir of La Salle's voyage alludes to "pirogues" canoes made by hollowing logs, but Hennepin changes the word in his Description to "perroquets," the French for parrots. In the Utrecht edition, however, he omits all the sentences quoted.

Relation of La Salle's Voyage.

Sur la fin du quatriesme jour, en traversant un petit lac que forme la riviere, on remarqua des fumees qui firent connoistre que les Sauvages estoient cabanez pres de la. En effet, le cinquiesme, sur les neuf heures du matin, on vit des duex costes de la riviere quantite de pirogues, et environ quatre vingts cabanes pleines de Sauvages qu' n'aperceurent les canots qu'apres quils eurent double une pointe derriere laquelle les Illinois estoient cabanez a demi-portee de fusil."

Hennepin's Description.

"Sur la fin du quatrieme jour entraversant un petit lac qui forme la riviere, on remarqua des fumees qui firent connoistre que les Sauvages estoient cabannez prez de la. En effet le cinquiesme sur les neuf heures du matin on vit des deux cotez de la Riviere quantite de *Peroquets* et environ quartre vingts cabannes pleines de Sauvages qui n'apperceurent nos Canots qu' apres que nous eumes double une pointe derriere laquelle les Illinois estoient campez a demie portee du fusil.

La Salle, on the 22d of August, 1682, wrote from Fort Frontenac, in which letter he disparaged his rival, Du Luth, and gave an account of the expedition of Michel Accault and Hennepin to Mille Lacs, in Minnesota.

Hennepin has also used the words of this account in many places of his "Discovery of Louisiana," while in some particulars he varies, and enlarges with narratives of his own exploits.

La Salle, in 1682, writes that on the 11th of April, 1680, about three o'clock in the afternoon, Accault and Hennepin were met on the Mississippi by one hundred Nadouesioux, who were on a war party against the Tchatchakigoua.

Hennepin writes in 1683, that it was about two o'clock, and that there were one hundred and twenty Indians on a war party against the Miamis, Illinois and Maroa.

La Salle writes, that "Michel Accault, *who was the leader*, presented them with the calumet."

Hennepin writes, "These savages, leaping from their canoes, some on to the land, and others in the water with cries and dreadful yells, approached us, and as we made no resistance, being but three, one snatched our calumet."

La Salle writes, "Upon landing, Michel Accault presented them with twenty knives, and a fathom and a half of tobacco, which they accepted."

Hennepin writes, "This forced me, with one of my men, leaving the other by our baggage, to go to their war chiefs and to scatter among them six axes, five knives, and six fathoms of our black tobacco, and bending my head I showed them with an axe that they might kill us if they desired."

La Salle writes, "Being about eight leagues below the Falls of Saint Anthony, they resolved to go by land to the village situated about sixty leagues from the place of landing. They did not wish to carry the goods of our people nor to go by water."

Hennepin writes, "Having arrived on the nineteenth day of our navigation, five leagues below Falls of St. Anthony, these Indians landed us in a bay."

Hennepin was chagrined at the cold reception accorded to his "Description of Louisiana," as indicated by the following letter directed to Abbe Renaudot, "at his house in Paris :"

"You know that I gave to you the first intelligence of our discovery, at my arrival, and made you the judge of the troubles which I have endured these four years. Nevertheless I perceive that M. l'Abbe Bernou does not use it, as he ought, out of regard to me."

He signs this letter "F. Louis Hennepin, pauvre esclave des barbars."

If it is true, as Margry supposes, that Abbe Bernou wrote the official history of La Salle's voyage, from which we have quoted, it is not strange that he should have treated Hennepin with but little respect.

"NOUVELLE DECOUVERTE," A. D. 1697.

The second work of Hennepin, an enlargement of the first, appeared at Utrecht in the year 1697, ten years after La Salle's death.*

During the interval between the publication of the first and second book, he had passed three years as Superintendent of the Recollects at Reny, in the province of Artois, when Father Hyacinth Lefevre, a friend of La Salle, and Commissary Provincial of Recollects at Paris, wished him to return to Canada. He refused, and

* Its full title reads : "Nouvelle Decouverte d'un tres Grand Pays, situe dans l'Amerique, entre le Nouveau Mexique, et la Mer Glaciale, Avec les cartes et les figures necessaires et de plus l'Histoire Naturelle et Morale, et les avantages qu' on en peut tirer par l'etablissement des colonies.

Le tout dedie a La Majeste Britannique Guillaume III par le R. P. Louis Hennepin, Missionaire Recollect et Notaire Apostolique. A Utrecht—Chez Guillaume Broedelet, Marchand Libraire. MDCXCVII.

was ordered to go to Rome, and upon his coming back was sent to a convent at St. Omer, and there received a dispatch from the Minister of State in France to return to the countries of the King of Spain, of which he was a subject. This order he asserts, he afterwards learned, was forged.

In the Preface to the English edition of the New Discovery, published in 1698, in London, he writes :

"The pretended reasons of that violent order was, because I refused to return into America where I had been already eleven years, though the particular laws of our Order oblige none of us to go beyond sea, against his will.

I would have, however, returned very willingly had I not sufficiently known the malice of Mr. La Salle, who would have exposed me, to make me perish, as he did one of the men who accompanied me in my Discovery. God knows that I am sorry for his unfortunate death, but the judgments of the Almighty are always just, for the gentleman was killed by one of his own men, who were at last sensible that he exposed them to visible dangers, without any necessity, and for his private designs."

After this he was for about five years at Gosselies, in Brabant, as Confessor in a convent, and from thence removed to his native place, Ath, in Belgium, where, according to his narrative in the preface to the "Nouveau Decouverte," he was again persecuted. Then Father Payez, Grand Commissary of Recollects at Louvain, being informed that the King of Spain and the Elector of Bavaria recommended the step, consented that he should enter the service of William the Third of Great Britain, who had been very kind to the Roman Catholics of Netherlands.

By order of Payez he was sent to Antwerp to take the lay habit in the convent there, and subsequently went to Utrecht, where he finished his second book known as the New Discovery.

His first volume, printed in 1683, contains 312 pages, with an appendix of 107 pages, on the Customs of the Savages, while the Utrecht book of 1697 contains 509 pages, without an appendix.

In the first chapter of this work Hennepin writes that on his way to Canada, near Rochelle, he acted as Curate, "being invited so to do by the Pastor of the place who had occasion to be absent from his charge."

Some have thought that no one who was a priest of the Church of Rome* would have used the word "pasteur," but these forget

* At the celebration of the two hundredth anniversary of the discovery of the Falls of Saint Anthony by Michel Ako and other Europeans, held at Minneapolis, on July 3d. 1880, Bishop Ireland, of the Roman Catholic Church, made the following remarks :

"John Gilmary Shea, some years ago, wrote on Hennepin and wrote very bit-

that in the days of Archbishop Fenelon, who lived at this period, a priest of the Church of Rome was sometimes called a pasteur.

In this chapter there is a sentence which however needs correction. It alleges that while Hennepin was in Canada "Abbe Fenelon, present Archbishop of Cambray, resided there."

It is true that Francis de Salignac de la Motte Fenelon was a priest in Canada when Hennepin was there, but with the same name he was only the half-brother of Francis de Salignac de la Motte Fenelon, the celebrated Archbishop of Cambray.

On page 249 of the "New Discovery" he begins an account of a voyage alleged to have been made to the mouth of the Mississippi, and occupies over sixty pages in the narrative.*

The opening sentences give as a reason for concealing to this time his discovery, that La Salle would have reported him to his Superiors for presuming to go down instead of ascending the stream toward the north as had been agreed, and that the two with him, threatened that if he did not consent to descend the river, they would leave him on shore during the night, and pursue their own course.

terly about him, stating that he could not be put forth as a truthful historian. On later and more careful examination Shea has changed his opinion. His book will be before the public in a few weeks, and will present in full his line of arguments. He has compared one with the other two volumes, the volume written at Paris and the one at Utrecht. The style is different. The Utrecht embraces all that was said in the first edition with additions, the object of which additions seems to have been to bring the volume up to date. Errors occur, blunders of which Hennepin could not be supposed capable; blunders in the wording of things relating to the Catholic Church, which shows that the compiler of the second volume could not even have been a Catholic. For instance, Catholic priests—who in the French are always set down as *curés*—are called *pasteurs*, while the word *pasteur* in the French language essentially indicates a Protestant minister."

* Bishop Ireland has fallen into a singular error in speaking of the Utrecht volume. He says:

"The volume is numbered to page 313, then these ten pages, differing in type, in the spacing of the lines, from the balance of the book, are all inserted in the volume under the same paging with a star after the number of the page (313*) showing plainly that these ten pages were added to the book after it had come forth from the hands of the printer.

They contained the so called voyage on the lower Mississippi, and were an interpolation in the volume after it had been issued from the press.

Now what is the conclusion of all this? Simply that it cannot be proved that Father Hennepin was ever the author or publisher of this Utrecht volume."

The Bishop never would have made these remarks if he had seen the Utrecht volume. The pages to which he alludes contain not a sentence about the lower Mississippi, and are a simple reprint of what had already appeared in the Description of 1683 published at Paris.

He asserts that he left the Gulf of Mexico to return on the 1st of April, and on the 24th left the Arkansas, but a week after this he declares that he landed with the Sioux* at the marsh about two miles below the city of Saint Paul.

The account has been and is still a puzzle to the historical student. In our review of his first book we have noticed that as early as 1683 he claimed to have descended the Mississippi. In the Utrecht publication he declares that while at Quebec, upon his return to France, he gave to Father Valentine Roux, Commissary of Recollects, his journal, upon the promise that it would be kept secret, and that this Father made a copy of his whole voyage, including the visit to the Gulf of Mexico, but in his Description of Louisiana, Hennepin wrote: "We had some design of going to the mouth of the river Colbert, which more probably empties into the Gulf of Mexico than into the Red Sea, but the tribes that seized us gave us no time to sail up and down the river."

DU LUTH AND HENNEPIN.

The additions in the Utrecht book to magnify his importance and detract from others, are many. As Sparks and Parkman have pointed out the plagiarisms of this edition, a reference here is unnecessary.

Du Luth, who left Quebec in 1678, and had been in northern Minnesota with an interpreter for a year, after he met Ako and Hennepin, becomes of secondary importance, in the eyes of the Franciscan.

In the Description of Louisiana, on page 289, Hennepin speaks of passing the Falls of Saint Anthony upon his return to Canada in these few words: "Two of our men seized two beaver robes at the Falls of St. Anthony of Padua, which the Indians had in sacrifice, fastened to trees."

But in the Utrecht edition, commencing on page 416, there is much added concerning Du Luth. After using the language of the edition of 1683, already quoted, it adds: "Hereupon there arose a dispute between the Sieur du Luth and myself. I commended what they had done, saying, 'The savages might judge by it that they disliked the superstition of these people."

"The Sieur du Luth, on the contrary, said that they ought to have left the robes where the savages placed them, for they would not fail to avenge the insult we had put upon them by this action, and that it was to be feared that they would attack us on the journey.

"I confessed he had some foundation for what he said, and that he spoke according to the rules of prudence. But one of the two men

* Page 339.

flatly replied that the two robes suited them, and they cared nothing for the savages and their superstitions.

"The Sieur du Luth, at these words, was so greatly enraged that he nearly struck the one who uttered them, but I intervened and settled the dispute. The Picard and Michel Ako ranged themselves on the side of those who had taken the robes in question, which might have resulted badly.

"I argued with Sieur du Luth that the savages would not attac' us, because I was persuaded that their great chief Ouasicoude would have our interests at heart, and he had great credit with his nation. The matter terminated pleasantly.

"When we arrived near the River Ouisconsin, we halted to smoke the meat of the buffalo we had killed on the journey. During our stay, three savages of the nation we had left came by the side of our canoe to tell us that their great chief Ouasicoude, having learned that another chief of these people wished to pursue and kill us, entered the cabin where he was consulting, and had struck him on the head with such violence as to scatter his brains upon his associates, thus preventing the executing of this injurious project.

"We regaled the three savages, having a great abundance of food at that time. The Sieur du Luth, after the savages had left, was as enraged as before, and feared that they would pursue and attack us on our voyage. He would have pushed the matter further, but seeing that one man would resist, and was not in the humor to be imposed upon, he moderated, and I appeased them in the end with the assurance that God would not abandon us in distress, and provided we confided in Him he would deliver us from our foes, because he is the protector of men and angels."

* * * * * * *

After describing a conference with the Sioux, he adds: "Thus the savages were very kind without mentioning the beaver robes. The Chief Ouasicoude told me to offer a fathom of Martinico tobacco to the Chief Aquipaguetin, who had adopted me as a son. This had an admirable effect upon the barbarians, who went off shouting several times the word Louis,* which, as he said, means the Sun. Without vanity, I must say that my name will be for a long time among these people.

"The savages having left us to go to war against the Messorites, the Maroha, the Illinois, and other nations which live toward the

* The Sioux or Dakotahs call the Sun by a word which a Frenchman would write Oui, pronounced We.

The Dakotah Lexicon, published by the Smithsonian Institution, writes the word for Sun, Wi, pronounced We. The Moon the Sioux call the Night-Sun, Hanyetu Wi.

lower part of the Mississippi, and are unreconcilable foes of the people of the North, the Sieur du Luth, who upon many occasions gave me marks of his friendship, could not forbear to tell our men that I had all the reason in the world to believe that the Vice Roy of Canada would give me a favorable reception, should we arrive before winter, and that he wished with all his heart that he had been among as many natives as myself."

The style of Louis Hennepin is unmistakable in this extract, and it is amusing to read his patronage of one of the fearless explorers of the Northwest, a cousin of Tonty, favored by Frontenac, and who was in Minnesota a year before his arrival.

In 1691, six years before the Utrecht edition of Hennepin, another Recollect Franciscan had published a book at Paris called "The First Establishment of the Faith in New France," in which is the following tribute to Du Luth, whom Hennepin strives to make a subordinate: "In the last years of M. de Frontenac's administration Sieur Du Luth, a man of talent and experience, opened a way to the missionary and the Gospel in many different nations, turning toward the north of that lake [Superior] where he even built a fort. He advanced as far as the Lake of the Issati, called Lake Buade, from the family name of M. de Frontenac, planting the arms of his Majesty in several nations on the right and left."

HENNEPIN'S "CONTINUATION."

In the second volume of his last book, which is called "A Continuance of the New Discovery of a Vast Country in America," etc., he noticed some criticisms.

To the objection that his work was dedicated to Willian the Third of Great Britain, he replies: "My King, his most Catholic Majesty, his Electoral Highness of Bavaria, the consent in writing of the Superiors of my order, the integrity of my Faith, and the regular observance of my vows which his Britannic Majesty allows me, are the best warrants of the uprightness of my intentions."

To the query, how he could travel so far upon the Mississippi in so little time, he answers with a bold face, "That we may with a canoe and a pair of oars go twenty, twenty-five, or thirty leagues every day and more too, if there be occasion. And though we had gone but ten leagues a day, yet in thirty days we might easily have gone three hundred leagues. If during the time we spent from the River of the Illinois to the mouth of the Meschasipi, in the Gulf of Mexico, we had used a little more haste we might have gone the same twice over."

To the objection that he said that he had passed eleven years in America, when he had been there but about four, he evas-

ively replies, that "reckoning from the year 1674, when I first set out, to the year 1688, when I printed the second edition of my Louisiana, it appears that I have spent fifteen years either in travels or printing my Discoveries."

To those who objected to the statement in his first book in the dedication to Louis the Fourteenth, that the Sioux always call the Sun, Louis, he writes: "I repeat what I have said before, that being among the Issati and Nadouessans, by whom I was made a slave in America, I never heard them call the Sun any other than Louis. It is true, these savages call also the Moon, Louis, but with this distinction, that they give the Moon the name of Louis Basatche, which in their language signifies the Sun that shines in the night."

The Utrecht edition of 1697 called forth much censure, and no one in France doubted that Hennepin was the author. D'Iberville, Governor of Louisiana, while in Paris, wrote, on July 3d, 1699, to the Minister of Marine and Colonies of France, in these words: "Very much vexed at the Recollect whose false narratives had deceived every one, and caused our suffering and total failure of our enterprise by the time consumed in the search of things which alone existed in his imagination."

Recent doubts can never shear of him of his reputation as the author of the "Nouvelle Decouverte," and nothing has been discovered to change the verdict of two centuries, that Louis Hennepin, Recollect Franciscan, was deficient in Christian manhood.

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